

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

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USINT BAGHDAD
5AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 5364
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DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0642

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINR, SY
SUBJ: NEW GOVERNORS APPOINTED IN SYRIA

1. PRESS ANNOUNCED JAN 30 APPOINTMENT OF WALID HAMDUN AS GOVERNOR OF DAMASCUS PROVINCE, ALI ZAYYUD AS GOVERNOR OF TARTOUS, AND HUSSEIN BATTIAH AS GOVERNOR OF ALEPPO PROVINCE.

2.(DUN IS A SUNNI, A BRIGADIER GENERAL, AND WAS FORMERLY THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE 3RD ARMORED DIVISION.

HE REPLACES ABDULLAH AL-LAZKANI WHO WAS INVESTIGATED BY SYE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE, REPORTEDLY AT THE INSTIGATION OF RIF'AT AL-ASSAD WHO WAS TRYING TO ATTACK THE SUPPORTERS OF ABDULLAH AL-AHMAR ON THE BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND.

3. ALI ZAYYUD IS AN ALAWITE, A BRIGADIER GENERAL, AND WAS FORMERLY COMMANDER OF THE 65TH ARMORED BRIGADE, SUBORDINATE TO THE 3RD ARMORED DIVISION. ALI ZAYYUD WAS REPORTEDLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00642 311152Z

A JADIDIST. HE REPLACED NAJIB AL-NA'EB WHO WAS IMPLICATED IN THE CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN.

4. HUSSEIN BATTIAH, ALSO AN ALAWITE, WAS CHIEF OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE FOR THE PROVINCE OF ALEPPO. WE ARE UNCERTAIN OF HIS RANK WHICH LAST JULY WAS LISTED AS CAPTAIN. BATTIAH HAS ALSO BEEN REPORTED AS HAVING JADIDIST LEANINGS. HE

REPLACED AHMAD ISMA'IL WHO WAS ASSIGNED AS AMBASSADOR TO INDONESIA.

5. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THE THREE NEW APPOINTMENTS WERE MADE TO PULL THESE MEN OUT OF SENSITIVE ARMY POSITIONS SINCE THEIR LOYALTIES WERE SUSPECT. THE 3RD ARMORED DIVISION HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN COMMANDED BY SUNNIS. ITS CURRENT COMMANDER BRIGADIER ABDAL HAMID AL-JAMAL, A SUNNI, IS THOUGHT TO BE OPPOSED TO THE ASSAD REGIME BUT WAS CONSIDERED SAFE SINCE HIS SUBORDINATE BRIGADE COMMANDERS WERE ALAWITE. UNDER THESE CONDITIONS IT IS NATURAL FOR THE REGIME TO REMOVE ANY OF JAMAL'S SUBORDINATES WHO WERE IN THE LEAST SUSPECT.

6. THE ALEPPO SECURITY CHIEF POSITION HAS BEEN A CONTINUING SOURCE OF TROUBLE FOR THE REGIME. IN DECEMBER 1976 THE DEPUTY SECURITY CHIEF ALI MAHNA WAS ASSASSINATED. THIS LED THE SECURITY CHIEF MUHAMMAD DUBA, BROTHER OF ALI DUBA, TO RESIGN. HE WAS REPLACED BY AN UNIDENTIFIED CAPTAIN WHO WAS REPORTEDLY ASSASSINATED IN MARCH 1977, PRESUMABLY

BATTAH REPLACED THIS MAN.

7. ALL THREE NEW APPOINTMENTS ARE SAID TO BE VERY TOUGH, STRONG MEN, WHO ARE EXPECTED TO IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THESE THREE IMPORTANT PROVINCES. THE REMOVAL OF GOVERNORS IMPLICATED IN THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN IS PROBABLY ALSO CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 00642 311152Z

INTENDED TO BOLSTER THE IMAGE OF THE ASSAD REGIME, JUST OVER A WEEK BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL REFERENDUM SCHEDULED FEBRUARY 8.
PELLETREAU

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